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Majorities within minorities:

The experiences of non-suicidal

self-injury in the LGBTQ communities.

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Abstract

Non-suicidal self-injury (NSSI) is a maladaptive behaviour, defined as the purposeful destruction of one's own body tissue performed in absence of suicidal intent or social custom. Research suggests that NSSI is a risk factor for suicidal ideation and suicide attempts. Research also suggests that LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer) identifying individuals are at a higher risk for experiencing mental distress, NSSI and suicidality. Within Aotearoa/New Zealand, the Youth'12: Health and Wellbeing of Secondary School Students survey found that LGBTQ adolescents had significantly higher rates of NSSI and were five times more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual and/or cisgender counterparts. This thesis addresses these concerns through a qualitative approach, guided by the methodology of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.

This research examines how LGBTQ individuals who have previously engaged in NSSI make sense of their experience. The six individuals interviewed share their background histories, the process of coming out, and their experiences with NSSI. Participants further comment on the various ways in which existing ideologies within their social climates impacted their overall health and wellbeing.

There were numerous challenges faced by the participants. Some experienced discriminatory behaviours from family, friends, and health professionals. The process of coming out as LGBTQ was a difficult time for many. Participants experienced stigma and discrimination in association with both their identity, and the self-injurious behaviour. NSSI was seen largely as a coping mechanism, and participants displayed resilience in light of their circumstances.

Self-esteem and self-acceptance increased as participants acquired a stronger sense of belonging through meaningful connections. Building supportive friendships, and finding a

community contributed to positive health outcomes. However, despite a solidified identity, societal pressures remained.

The results of this thesis suggest that education and tailored support from health professionals is of utmost importance. The ongoing challenges experienced by the participants are reflected in research, and signify that educating families, health professionals, and the wider society is a crucial step in assisting this at-risk group. Implications for future directions are discussed.

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